

# NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL DELIVERY SKILLS PROGRAMME

## - Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation -

### Background Report 4

Prepared for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
(Neighbourhood Renewal Unit)

*by*

*Derrick Johnstone, EDuce Ltd*

*Susan Johnstone, EDuce Ltd*

*Solihin Garrard, Makesfive Ltd*

*January 2005*

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL DELIVERY SKILLS PROGRAMME**

### **- Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation - Background Report 4**

#### **Contents**

		<i>page</i>
1	Key Findings	1
2	Origins of the Delivery Skills Programme	3
3	Participant Feedback	8
4	Evaluation Survey Findings	11
5	Developing the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme	21
6	Conclusions and Recommendations	28
 <i>Appendices</i>		
A	Breakdown of Participants on the Pilot Courses	31
B	Interviewee Characteristics	32
C	Questions on Achievement of Learning Objectives	34

This report describes the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme and its take-up, and presents results from participant feedback questionnaires and our own survey of participants on the six courses run as a pilot. Key findings relate ways of improving the delivery of the programme and maximising the learning for participants and their colleagues.

This is one of six background research reports accompanying the main evaluation report, “Seeking the Lessons: Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation”, all of which can be downloaded from [www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk). The six are:

- NRU and GO Strategies and Delivery (Background Report 1)
- Findings from the Field (Background Report 2)
- Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers (Background Report 3)
- Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills (Background Report 4)
- Regional Networks (Background Report 5)
- Renewal.net (Background Report 6)

The main report contains a brief description of the overall methodological model, the project bibliography and glossary.

*We wish to thank all our interviewees and survey respondents for their time and considered feedback. Paul Philpott (responsible for management of the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Programme within the NRU Skills and Knowledge Team) and Gemma Penn (project manager for the Skills and Knowledge Programme evaluation in the NRU Research and Development Division) played key roles in steering this component of the research. Thanks are due also to Kevin Sugrue, Kate Foley and Carole Segonds of Renaisi (Renewal Academy) for their input to the evaluation, including their experience in running the programme and access to course evaluation forms.*

© Crown copyright 2005

*This publication, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.*

This report was prepared for:

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU  
tel 020 7944 4400  
[www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

Enquiries regarding the publication may be addressed to Derrick Johnstone, Director, EDuce ltd, St John's Innovation Centre, Cowley Road, Cambridge CB4 0WS (tel 01223 421685; e-mail [derrick.johnstone@educe.co.uk](mailto:derrick.johnstone@educe.co.uk))

## 1 KEY FINDINGS

The Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme has been developed to address critical learning needs amongst neighbourhood renewal practitioners, initially concentrating on 'Partnership Working and Leadership', 'Programme Design and Delivery', and 'Learning from What Works'. Six three-day training modules, with 70 participants, were piloted by the contractors, *RenewalAcademy* between December 2003 and June 2004, with each topic offered at strategic and operational levels. Our findings draw primarily on a follow-up survey of participants to gain evidence of the learning they have gained and applied.

We conclude that the pilot Delivery Skills Programme has begun to tackle critical learning needs in neighbourhood renewal, addressing significant needs not adequately covered by other provision, and with a strong bias towards National Strategy implementation

### *Quality of the pilot programme*

- On-course ratings of course quality by participants have been very positive, especially in their enjoyment of the course (an average score of 4.3 out of 5).
- In our follow-up survey of participants (undertaken three months after their courses), we found that more than two out of three rated the content of their course as good or excellent, though one in six regarded it as poor.
- Comments suggested that the courses had fulfilled requirements in the NRU brief that the programme be practical, stimulating, interactive and informed by live case studies. Higher ratings tended to reflect the quality of external speakers, study visits, experienced course leaders, and group working.
- Lower ratings reflected administrative teething problems, difficulties in pitching the content to meet the needs of participants with diverse levels of experience, and some issues concerning course design and delivery (eg, over the currency of some content and the quality of some presenters) and about pre-course administration. Those less satisfied, however, supported the aims of the programme and offered suggestions for improvement.
- Just under a quarter wanted to go on more *RenewalAcademy* courses; and over half have recommended the programme to others. This can be regarded as a proxy for views on course quality.

### *Benefits of participation*

- For many participants the greatest gains have come from "*networking*": getting to know their fellow participants and share their trials and tribulations. There were frequent comments about feeling less isolated in their jobs, and gaining reassurance over how they are approaching their jobs. Many felt that they are in pioneering job roles, forging a path on neighbourhood renewal for others in their locality.
- Other reported benefits included: new contacts, time for reflection, and valuable information to pass on to others.

### *Transfer of learning*

- There is less evidence of achievement of course learning objectives in relation to the Delivery Skills Programme brief, which sought to equip participants “*with practical skills to radically alter the way they work, enabling them to embed new skills and knowledge into their ongoing practice*”. While on completion of their course, participants rated their course ‘good’ (nearly ‘very good’ - an average score of 3.9 out of 5) for equipping them better for their role in neighbourhood renewal, we found that most participants felt that their course had helped them only ‘a bit’ (not ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’) in relation to the specific learning outcomes identified for each course. This finding raises questions about the design of the learning programmes, about the case for post-course follow-up, and about what outcomes it is realistic to expect from a three day course.
- This said, three quarters of participants felt that they applied something useful they had learnt from their course (while a quarter had applied nothing, or very little). Examples included reappraising personal behaviours, assessing the value of personal involvement in specific partnerships, and paying consistently more attention to the use of evidence in developing and reviewing strategies and projects.

### *Actions and results*

- Two thirds of participants reckoned that they had made changes to their working practices, especially in their approach to partnership working (eg, in setting up a partnership, seeking to exert influence within a partnership, or resolve a conflict). A quarter reported to changes in monitoring and evaluation practices or otherwise in their use of evidence.
- When asked about evidence of improvements in partnership or organisational performance, or outcomes for local people, one third felt that it was too early to say, and a quarter could not identify any. Those that said they could, tended to report progress in partnership working rather than (as yet) improved performance, and nothing that they could quantify.

## **Principal Recommendations**

	<b>Action by</b>
1. Review how to maximise the extent to which participants are likely to apply what they learn after their courses.	NRU, Renewal Academy
2. Explore further options for development under the Delivery Skills programme: masterclasses, action learning, and non-residential provision, and blended learning (combining different forms of learning to make more of a package) - while ensuring complementary approaches with regional plans)	NRU, Renewal Academy
3. Make operational improvements to programme provision (eg, in course design, use of participant experience, learning materials and administration) and marketing	Renewal Academy

## 2 Origins of the Delivery Skills Programme

### 2.1 Learning Curve commitments

The Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme implements one of a number of commitments in The Learning Curve, which relate to improving the supply of learning opportunities and skills for work in the field. These stem from concerns to address both skill shortages and skill gaps<sup>1</sup> - and a concern about variable quality of existing learning provision.

Learning Curve Actions on Learning Opportunities and Skills	
<b>Action 8</b>	Programme of work to explore: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the role of occupational standards and vocational qualifications in recognising achievement</li> <li>▪ accrediting learning providers offering neighbourhood renewal programmes</li> <li>▪ bursaries targeted at residents</li> <li>▪ developing current neighbourhood renewal training material into exemplary training packages</li> </ul>
<b>Action 9</b>	Develop leadership programmes for those working within neighbourhoods. (with an early priority to provide for chairs and chief executives of neighbourhood partnerships, partnership boards and succession planning for the next generation of community leaders)
<b>Action 10</b>	Develop new approaches to neighbourhood renewal learning (eg, through funding of smaller scale pilot projects)

The NRU has sought to examine how best to develop high quality learning provision within higher, further, adult and community education, and to ensure that there are mechanisms for recognising achievement and enabling learners to progress in ways which build their skills and lead to qualifications. Its intention has been to supplement and enhance, rather than replace, existing regional and local provision, and has been concerned with informal as well as formal (ie, accredited) learning opportunities. Qualifications routes are important for several reasons, to motivate learners, to serve as a mark of quality of learning undertaken, and as a means of accessing funding for learning (primarily through further, adult and community education supported by the Learning and Skills Council).

Activities pursued by the NRU Skills and Knowledge Team have included:

- the Mainstreaming Neighbourhood Renewal Skills project (which has developed a framework of competence-based standards for work in neighbourhood renewal, linked to existing standards and qualifications across relevant occupations)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Skill shortages' relates to situations where there is a shortfall in the numbers of people in the labour market with the required skills to meet demand, whereas 'skill gaps' relate to the difference between the skills of the *current* workforce and those skills required for effective performance. Both lead to organisational under-performance.

<sup>2</sup> The approach has involved the development of 'functional map' which identifies the range job roles and functions required for neighbourhood renewal. Components of the map can then be matched with standards and qualifications produced by Sector Skills Councils (the national lead bodies for skills and qualifications in occupational sectors such as Health and Justice), and gaps identified which need to be filled to meet specific needs in neighbourhood renewal. Occupational standards provide the basis for national qualifications and have a range of other applications, eg, in reviewing organisational and partnership functions, drafting job descriptions,

- research undertaken by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) to examine how further education colleges and Local Education Authority (LEA) adult education services contribute to neighbourhood renewal in deprived areas, and to consider how their strategic role might develop

The Skills and Knowledge programme has also supported DfES in funding a project to pilot community leadership programmes, intended to provide lessons and models that might be transferable to other deprived areas. Programme teams within the NRU also have an interest in improving learning opportunities within their domains. For example, the Neighbourhood Management and Wardens Team has supported the development of national qualifications for wardens and, in parallel with the NDC team, has introduced action learning sets for managers. Action learning sets have also been run on key topics within the LSP Formative Evaluation project (on topics such as mainstreaming and performance management).

Several projects have been carried forward through GO Skills and Knowledge Action Plans (investigating the need for accredited qualification for board members of regeneration partnerships in the North West, and a framework to recognise resident involvement in regeneration in the West Midlands; and developing a Regional Capacity Building Programme linked to Open College Network qualifications in Yorkshire and the Humber). Some GOs have also supported new provision, eg, a feasibility project for Regen School in the North East. GO interest in developing the supply of learning opportunities has increasingly shifted to the potential role of the RCE in their region, along with awaiting the national roll-out of the Delivery Skills programme.

## 2.2 Developing the Delivery Skills Programme

The main emphasis of the Skills and Knowledge Team is now on the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme. This was instigated in summer 2003 when tenders were invited for a framework agreement to develop and deliver the programme, described in the box below. Two stages were envisaged, the first aimed at early priorities proposed by the NRU, and the second, a longer term programme, meeting a broader range of learning needs identified through further research. Their knowledge of potential suppliers led the NRU to encourage potential tenderers to consider forming consortia to deliver the project, on the grounds that it was unlikely that any one possible provider could offer the range of experience, skills and knowledge to deliver the programme successfully.

Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme - Stage 1 Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Partnership working and leadership skills:</b> identifying potential partners; partnership development; interpersonal skills; partnership management; delivering through partners;</li><li>▪ <b>Programme design and delivery:</b> strategic programme management; identifying, selecting and establishing plausible interventions at neighbourhood and local authority level; influencing mainstream service delivery; managing the delivery chain; problem solving; managing, monitoring and evaluating interventions;</li><li>▪ <b>Learning from what works:</b> understanding evidence-based practice; identifying sources of evidence; identifying information and learning needs; applying what works; using what works to reshape mainstream service provision; tailoring what works to local circumstances.</li></ul>

---

personal development planning, and devising learning objectives and content of training programmes.

In Stage 1 two training courses were expected on each topic, one aimed at practitioners who identify themselves as having intermediate skills and the other at those seeking to develop advanced skills.

The specification required that the training “*equip participants with practical skills to radically alter the way they work, enabling them to embed new skills and knowledge into their ongoing practice*”. It stressed that the content should be “*practical, grounded and informed by live case study examples*” and cover the range of neighbourhood renewal themes. It was to embrace principles stressed in the Learning Curve of joint learning and opportunity to reflect on practice, and be linked closely to the other Skills and Knowledge tools.

The target audience of the programme was identified as people working in neighbourhood renewal in those areas supported by the NRU: the 88 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) areas plus New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Management pathfinders outside these areas. Participants might include paid workers or volunteer activists, and was to cater for individuals at all levels of seniority. Priority was to be given to practitioners from partnerships diagnosed through performance management systems as being most in need of learning support.

### **2.3 Delivering the first phase**

The successful consortium, *RenewalAcademy* (led by Renaisi, originally with a4e, Northern College and Teesside University) proceeded to develop and run six, three-day courses across the three themes in the programme specification. These have been branded as “Creating Impact” for the senior/ strategic courses and “Delivering Impact” for the operational ones. A total of 70 people attended these courses, run between December 2003 and May 2004. No fees were charged on the grounds that this was a pilot exercise and participants were to be recruited from priority audiences. Table 1 below summarises typical learning objectives and course content.

Learning objectives for the courses were set by *RenewalAcademy*. While applicants for the initial courses were invited in advance to say what they wanted out of the course, the practice has shifted to devoting part of the first morning of each course to discussing and probing participants wants, needs and expectations - with a view to tweaking course content as necessary. The overriding aim for all the courses is that “participants should as a result of attending a course feel better equipped to fulfill their role in delivering neighbourhood renewal”.

*RenewalAcademy* have stressed a ‘co-tutoring’ approach, intended to combine the best of educational expertise and real-world experience. Lead tutors are drawn from higher education (for the strategic courses) and from further education (for the operational courses) with neighbourhood renewal practitioners (including NRAs) leading some workshops or as acting as ‘shadow’ facilitators in others. ‘Expert witnesses’ (presenters) for individual course slots come from a range of roles – NDC Chief Executive, LSP Chief Executive, Neighbourhood Manager, partnership chair, elected mayor, etc. The practitioners who are involved in running the courses may also serve as ‘expert witnesses’. Opportunities are taken to feature relevant tools as appropriate (eg, introducing *Renewal.net* and *Floor Targets Interactive*, findings from NRU research, etc).



**Table 1 Pilot Courses: Illustrative Programmes**

	<b>Partnership Working &amp; Leadership (strategic)</b>	<b>Programme Design &amp; Delivery (operational)</b>	<b>Learning from What Works (strategic)</b>
<b>Learning objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ understand the neighbourhood renewal context for partnership working</li> <li>▪ identify what causes exclusion and conflict and how to overcome these</li> <li>▪ provide leadership &amp; influence partnership outcomes</li> <li>▪ implement 'what works' in partnership working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ appreciate the project cycle approach to project &amp; programme management</li> <li>▪ apply project management tools</li> <li>▪ link activities to programme outcomes</li> <li>▪ monitor projects &amp; programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ identify &amp; interpret appropriate evidence</li> <li>▪ use evidence to improve the robustness of delivery</li> <li>▪ identify where &amp; how mainstreaming can be deployed to improve services and sustainability</li> <li>▪ explain to others the importance of using evidence</li> </ul>
<b>Day 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ significance of partnership delivering the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal</li> <li>▪ building cohesion and avoiding conflict</li> <li>▪ case study of a successful partnership</li> <li>▪ review of participant experience of partnership working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ introduction to project cycles, problem identification and objective setting</li> <li>▪ evidence-based design (including tools for gathering evidence; stakeholder involvement; equality &amp; diversity)</li> <li>▪ options appraisal; project appraisal &amp; risk analysis</li> <li>▪ linking activities to outcomes</li> <li>▪ experience of one NDC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the National Strategy and the importance of an evidence-based approach</li> <li>▪ assessing the quality of research/ sources of evidence</li> <li>▪ key sources</li> <li>▪ using evidence to plan and evaluate interventions</li> </ul>
<b>Day 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ working effectively in teams</li> <li>▪ skills needed for partnership working</li> <li>▪ use of performance management in developing partnership effectiveness</li> <li>▪ site visit to a successful partnership</li> <li>▪ reflections on the site visit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ choosing the delivery agent</li> <li>▪ contract management</li> <li>▪ effective monitoring</li> <li>▪ how projects and interventions link to form an effective strategy</li> <li>▪ sustaining impact (including mainstreaming and forward strategies)</li> <li>▪ how performance management can improve delivery</li> <li>▪ GO expectations of project/ programme design and delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ improving the delivery of mainstream services</li> <li>▪ processes and practices for effective partnership working</li> <li>▪ study visit (to investigate what has worked and what has not worked well in achieving change across different NR theme areas)</li> </ul>
<b>Day 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ leadership styles and their relevance to partnership working</li> <li>▪ roles, responsibilities &amp; accountability of key partnership actors</li> <li>▪ meaning of leadership in partnership - how to effect change</li> <li>▪ case study/ role play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ effective evaluation</li> <li>▪ personal action planning</li> <li>▪ participant presentations</li> <li>▪ review of learning from the course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ assessing whether 'best practice' is relevant in local circumstances</li> <li>▪ role of monitoring and evaluation in demonstrating success and learning lessons</li> <li>▪ case study project (one that didn't work)</li> <li>▪ action research</li> <li>▪ personal action planning</li> </ul>

The consortium stresses seeking contributions from participants themselves and creating opportunities for group working around real life experiences. Action planning is built in to the course schedules, to help ensure that the learning gained is put in practice when participants return to their jobs<sup>3</sup>. Study visits were included for four out of the six courses (those on Programme Design and Delivery being the exceptions). The course developers have also sought to weave equality and diversity content into the programme, recognising these topics as common areas of weakness within partnerships.

The programme is overseen by a Project Board involving representatives of the consortium, the NRU, other Government Departments and GOs. There are now six HE institutions and three FE Colleges within the consortium - helping to achieve a wider NRU goal of engaging FE and HE in developing new and better provision for neighbourhood renewal.

Significant time - more than expected at the outset - has been devoted to course development, in part to ensure that the content fully reflects current policy and practice. Course feedback, eg, has led to more preparation on mainstreaming knowhow, data collection and analysis, and strategic commissioning. The budget for developing and running the first 17 courses (including the six pilots and five programme specific courses) was £334,432 (£19,672 per course). (Earmarked costs for future courses average £16,000 for three day courses and £12,000 for two day courses, including venue and accommodation charges.) Such budgeting allows for generous time in programme development and programme on-costs.

Marketing has been undertaken via Government Offices and other NRU channels (eg, the national Neighbourhood Management Network) - much by e-mail, personal contact and publicity at events. GO Skills and Knowledge staff have been expected to play a key role in identifying potential participants, but have been placed in a difficult position given short notice (in early cases, *very* short notice - eg, two to three weeks) of forthcoming courses<sup>4</sup>.

Subsequent to the pilot courses, a further set of six courses was run in autumn 2004, plus variants adapted for NDC partnerships and Community Empowerment Networks. The Partnership Working and Leadership course was also tried out for a specific LSP, Derby City Partnership.

RenewalAcademy has recognised the need for longer notice for the three day courses. The programme of forthcoming courses is now published on the RenewalAcademy website ([www.renewalacademy.org.uk](http://www.renewalacademy.org.uk)) and via Renewal.net. They are also devoting more effort to building relationships with GO staff, and developing their own marketing channels to reach partnerships and potential participants.

---

<sup>3</sup> Time is made available on the courses for participants to complete an action planning exercise. For example, on the Programme Design and Delivery course, they have been invited to consider what they would do differently in planning, delivery, monitoring and mainstreaming - actions, whom they need to talk to, and when they will carry the actions out.

<sup>4</sup> This was partly the result of a concern to get the programme under way before the end of 2003 - not long after commissioning and limited the lead time available for course design and publicity. Limited advance notice and timing in March (when there is much pressure in organisations to ensure year-end targets are achieved) led to a postponement of the first two courses on Programme Design and Delivery.

## **3 Participant Feedback**

### **3.1 Breakdown of programme participants**

Of the 70 participants in the pilot courses, the largest groups by occupation have been Neighbourhood Managers, NDC Programme Managers (10 each - 14%), LSP Support Officers and project managers (9 each - 13%). Local authorities accounted for 19 participants (27%) and NDCs for 17 (24%). The rest were drawn from LSPs (10), community activists or representatives (9), Neighbourhood Management partnerships (5), with three each from CENs, the private sector and central government. There was one participant from a PCT. London provided the most participants (19), followed by North West (12), North East (10) and Yorkshire and Humber (9). Some 10 (14%) were drawn from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, and over half (39 - 56%) were women.

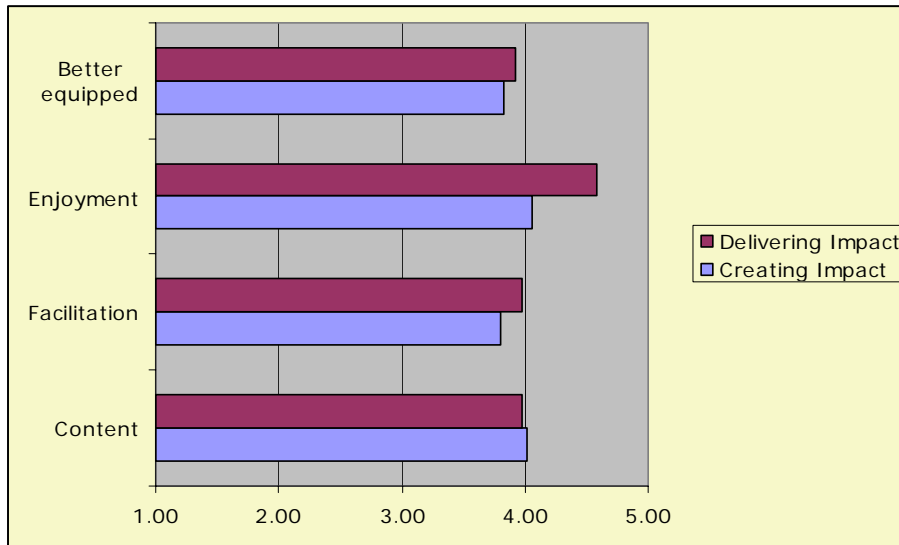
There was a concern within *RenewalAcademy* and the project board (management group) that the programme had not been attracting sufficient numbers from partnerships deemed most in need (ie, those which are faring less well in their performance management reviews). The organisers found that staff in these partnerships are under particularly heavy pressure from work demands, and find it all the more difficult to find the time for learning and reflection. There has also been difficulty in drawing participants from across a full range of partner agencies, beyond people employed in LSPs and neighbourhood partnerships.

Several participants came as substitutes for the original person who booked. There has also been a tendency for participants to book places at the last minute and the organisers report a relatively high level of numbers pulling out (about a third of those booking), again from pressure of time.

### **3.2 Feedback from the courses**

Before the end of each course, *RenewalAcademy* invited participants to score each session from 1-5 (1 = poor; 2 = less than satisfactory; 3 = satisfactory; 4 = good; 5 = very good) for content and facilitation. They also asked them whether they enjoyed the course and whether they felt better equipped to carry out their role in delivering neighbourhood renewal. Figure 1 provides the summary ratings for the two categories of course, Creating Impact (strategic) and Delivering Impact (operational). The only marked difference was the higher average rating on course enjoyment on Delivering Impact.

**Figure 1 Ratings for ‘Creating Impact’ and ‘Delivering Impact’ Courses**



N = 171 participants

Table 2 provides a more detailed analysis for ratings of content, facilitation, course enjoyment and ‘feeling better equipped’.

**Table 2 Participant Ratings for Course Content and Facilitation**

Course	Content	Facilitation	Enjoyment	Better equipped
Delivering Impact: Partnership Working and Leadership	4.08	3.97	4.64	3.94
Creating Impact: Partnership Working and Leadership	3.79	3.75	4.00	3.83
Delivering Impact: Programme Design and Delivery	3.86	3.81	4.44	3.67
Creating Impact: Programme Design and Delivery	4.30	4.00	4.30	4.00
Delivering Impact: Learning from What Works	3.97	4.15	4.67	4.14
Creating Impact: Learning from What Works	3.98	3.66	3.86	3.67
<i>Averages</i>	<i>4.00</i>	<i>3.89</i>	<i>4.32</i>	<i>3.88</i>

Source: RenewalAcademy course evaluation form - completed by all 70mm participants

The average score for the first six courses for course enjoyment was relatively high (better than ‘good’) at 4.32; and for being better equipped for their role, the view was positive at 3.88. No score for any of these elements was below 3.67. There has been a tendency for the ‘Delivering Impact’ courses to score more highly in the feedback, with the most positive course being Delivering Impact: Learning from What Works (4.67 and 4.14). In contrast, the Creating Impact: Learning from What Works was the lowest rated (3.86 and 3.67).<sup>5</sup>

These satisfaction ratings are broadly comparable to those found by an evaluation of *Working Together, Learning Together* (WTLT) run in Scotland in 2001-02, in some ways the

<sup>5</sup> More recent courses have also scored well: the Programme Design and Delivery course for NDCs rated 4.58 for content, 4.65 for facilitation, 4.93 for enjoyment and 4.82 for confidence in equipping participants to carry out their role better, and that for CENs rated 3.92, 4.08, 4.56 and 4.25 respectively. The open courses in July 2004 on Partnership Working and Leadership scored 3.82, 3.91, 4.10 and 4.13.

nearest equivalent to the Delivery Skills programme. WTLT brought partners together from Social Inclusion Partnerships for training in partnership working, intended to improve the quality of collaboration between agencies and community representatives (Scott and others, 2004).

## **4 Evaluation Survey Findings**

### **4.1 Approach to the participant survey**

In June-July 2004, we interviewed by telephone 43 out of the 70 participants (61%), starting with participants on the earliest courses first<sup>6</sup>. In practice, this meant that between two and six months had elapsed between the dates of the course and our follow up<sup>7</sup>.

The survey sought to draw out the learning gained from a number of angles, eg, the most useful part of the course; achievement of learning objectives; the main thing learnt; and to establish whether the course had led to any changes in working practices, improvements in performance or community outcomes (while recognising that participants had had relatively limited time to put their learning into practice). The questionnaire also asked for feedback on satisfaction with course quality (delivery content and administration) and on participant willingness to pay for Delivery Skills courses (relevant to future options for developing and funding the programme).

### **4.2 Participant characteristics**

The participants were drawn almost equally from the three course topics, 14 from the first two and 15 from Learning from What Works. Most (25) had attended the strategic option (Creating Impact), with the rest the operational version (Delivering Impact).

Over one third (16) came from local authorities (mainly from regeneration teams or departments), the next group being NDCs (13)<sup>8</sup>. Others were drawn from voluntary and community organisations. 28 were women and seven were from BME groups. Just over half have less than five years' experience in regeneration and renewal; four out of five were graduates or postgraduates; and half have no specific qualification in renewal, regeneration or a related field. Some 13 were partnership managers, and six partnership support officers. Ten had operational responsibilities in local authorities and six, strategic ones.

### **4.3 Satisfaction with course content and administration**

#### *Course content*

We invited interviewees to rate their satisfaction with course content and course administration. This paints a slightly different picture to the analysis of the satisfaction forms completed during the events themselves.

---

<sup>6</sup> We were able to contact with 67 out of 70 participants by phone or e-mail, and made a minimum of two attempts to secure an interview. We exceeded our target of interviewing half of all participants.

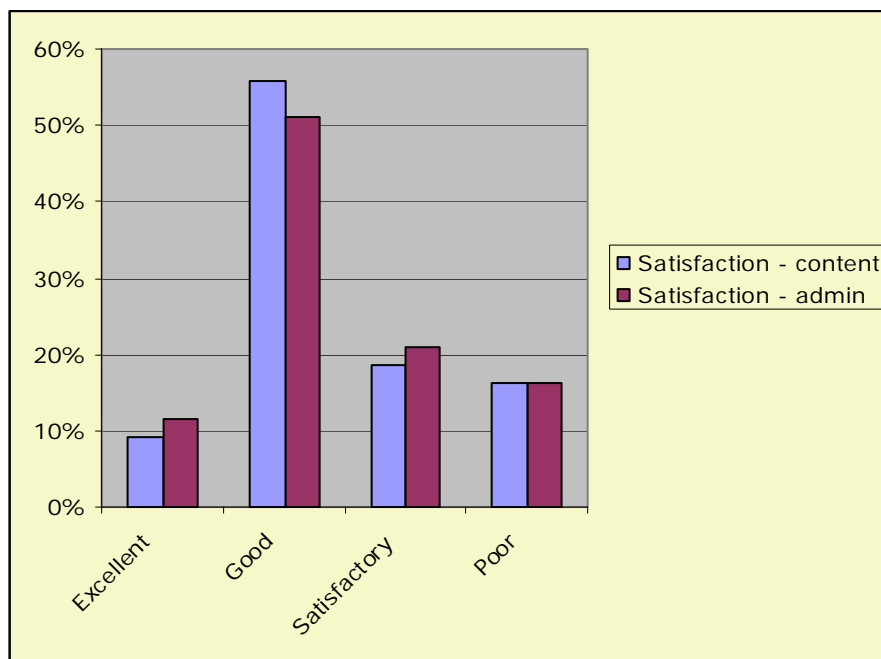
<sup>7</sup> The difference was a consequence of milestones for reporting on the Skills and Knowledge Programme evaluation project. Three to four months later would have been the ideal timing to undertake the follow up survey for all of the courses.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of participant characteristics.

While just over half (56%) stated that their expectations for the course were met, the remainder expressed concerns, either feeling that it had not delivered what they were looking for (21%) or had done so only in part (23%).

Interviewees gave some very strong positive feedback, and some critical - reflecting in part difficulties of pitching the content where there were participants with very different experiences. When asked to assess the quality of the course, **two thirds rated the course content good or excellent, though one in six regarded it as poor.** Figure 2 provides a breakdown of participant satisfaction with course content and administration.

**Figure 2 Participant satisfaction with course content and administration**



*N = 43 survey respondents*

Looking at the reasons for high and for poor scores, we found explanations of 'excellent' ratings to include:

- the quality of the external speakers (eg, Mayor of Middlesbrough, Sheffield First Partnership Director)
- study visits
- experienced course leaders
- group working (eg, tasks and role plays)
- the quality of content and approach

**Answers across a number of questions indicated that overwhelmingly the most appreciated aspect of the courses was the opportunity to share their experience.**

*"There was a mix of people to share experiences with and helped to flush out necessary issues."*

PROGRAMME DESIGN AND DELIVERY (PDD) PARTICIPANT

*"The mix of theory and practical aspects provided a good balance and benefited from the approach."*

PDD

*"It was a good, well organised course at good location."*

PARTNERSHIP WORKING & LEADERSHIP (PWL)

*"The venue and accommodation both pleasant and appropriate."*

PWL

*"It was enjoyable and relevant. I appreciated the three strands: taking time out to reflect, learning from my peers, and the structured tutoring and content. These were equally useful and helpful."*

PDD

*"I got a lot from the course. It was three days well spent."*

LEARNING FROM WHAT WORKS (LWW)

A separate question asked participants what they found the *most useful part of the course*. Site visits were the most prominently mentioned in the cases of Partnership Working and Leadership (by six out of 14) and by five out of 15 on Learning from What Works (they did not feature in Programme Design and Delivery). The content on evaluation came out highest for four out of eight on the strategic Programme Design and Delivery course and there was no notably strong element for the operational one. Neighbourhood renewal strategy and the importance of evidence was highlighted by a further four of the strategic Learning from What Works participants.

Reasons for '*poor*' ratings included a range of factors concerning content, delivery and administration (some directly the opposite of aspects of positive feedback). Some participants had very demanding expectations; these appeared to be people well used to going on professional updating and training courses. They wanted very high quality and very relevant content - especially to justify three days away. Criticisms related to:

- weaknesses in course design (eg, too many topics; parts not linking up, or not delivered)

*"The course was badly constructed; parts did not link up; the content was not at all what I expected and was poor. It wasn't at a high enough level, and I didn't learn anything."*

PWL

*"The course was a missed opportunity. It's important to recognise that the neighbourhood renewal agenda is new and needs new approaches and challenging techniques."*

PWL

- content not up-to-date (eg, on LSP performance management in the first Partnership Working and Leadership course), nor sufficiently leading edge, or too general

*"I'd expected the content to be cutting edge, relevant, and directly applicable. It was not."*

PWL

- content not reflecting breadth of interest amongst participants



*“The focus was slanted to NDCs even though the participants were mostly not from NDCs. There was quite a lot of feeling about that.”*  
PWL

There were also criticisms of poor facilitation (mainly an issue with one tutor on Learning from What Works, particularly in not getting enough out of the participants). Several felt that their course didn't provide what was advertised, making comments such as:

*“What the literature said it was was NOT what it actually was. It sold itself as having the answers and it didn't. The content was too low level and didn't stretch me. It did not seem as if providers knew much if anything more than attendees.”*  
PDD

*“It was too basic for some. The group was asked, Do you know what a Floor Target is?”*  
PDD

These comments also reflect the problem faced by the facilitators in pitching course content where participants have varying levels of experience. We note that some of the participants were very new to their job.

Amongst the critics, it is important to note that they expressed goodwill towards the aims of the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme. A typical comment was,

*“There were some really good things. Don't scrap the courses but improve them, including the way they are devised.”*  
LWW

### *Satisfaction with course administration*

While some people were very happy about course administration (including not noticing it - a good sign!), there were criticisms relating in particular to the **poor quality of pre-course information**. At least 12 - more than a quarter - raised this concern, feeling that this had frustrated their ability to get the most out of the course. Participants said that they would have appreciated a participants list, and fuller information to help them orient themselves to the course content and discuss it with colleagues in advance. There were also some concerns about the quality of the joining instructions and on some courses, criticisms of the venue (inappropriate location and unhelpful behaviour of the hotel management). There was a particular problem on one Programme Design and Delivery course where the tutors had made promises to follow up with material and email addresses, etc which had not been kept.

## **4.4 What have participants learnt and applied?**

### *Learning 'gains' and benefits*

The test of the value of any training comes later: have participants applied what they have learnt, and is this helping to make a difference for them and their organisation? To

explore this, we started by asking an open question, “What was the main thing you learnt from taking part in the course?”

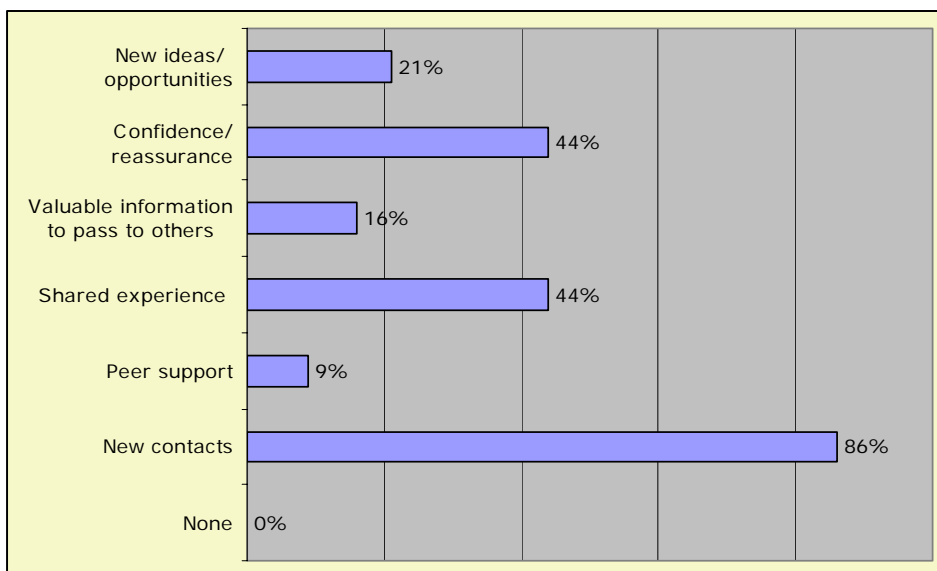
The most prominent response - by far, and across all the courses - did *not* relate to a particular skill or element of knowledge. Rather the response related to **a feeling of ‘I’m not on my own’**. This was the most significant learning ‘gain’ for nearly a quarter (10), with a few others making related comments:

*“The course was one thing; meeting with and working with others was another and very useful indeed.”*

*“It feels as if Neighbourhood Renewal is part of a massive experiment - as such it’s quite scary.”*

This finding was reinforced by responses to the question, “What other benefits have you gained from the course?”. More than four in five (37) welcomed establishing new contacts, and just under half noted increased confidence or reassurance and the shared experience. Some 13 explicitly referred to “networking” as a benefit. These are all benefits that can be more pronounced as a consequence of a two or three day course compared to a one day course - given the time that participants have to get to know one another. There were also related comments on the value of having time out to reflect and learn, and broaden your perspective. We found examples where contacts made had been followed up, eg, a link between two very different partnerships in Derwentside and West Cornwall. In other cases, participants had agreed to share some of their own tools and practices.

**Figure 3 Additional course benefits**



*N = 43 survey respondents*

We observe that participants found these benefits of reassurance and sharing concerns and challenges significant. Many may not have solved problems they brought to their course, but they have a sense of reassurance that these are not unique to them and that the problems are somehow more manageable. There was a theme to several interviews where the participants were acting as pioneers, breaking new ground (eg, in promoting

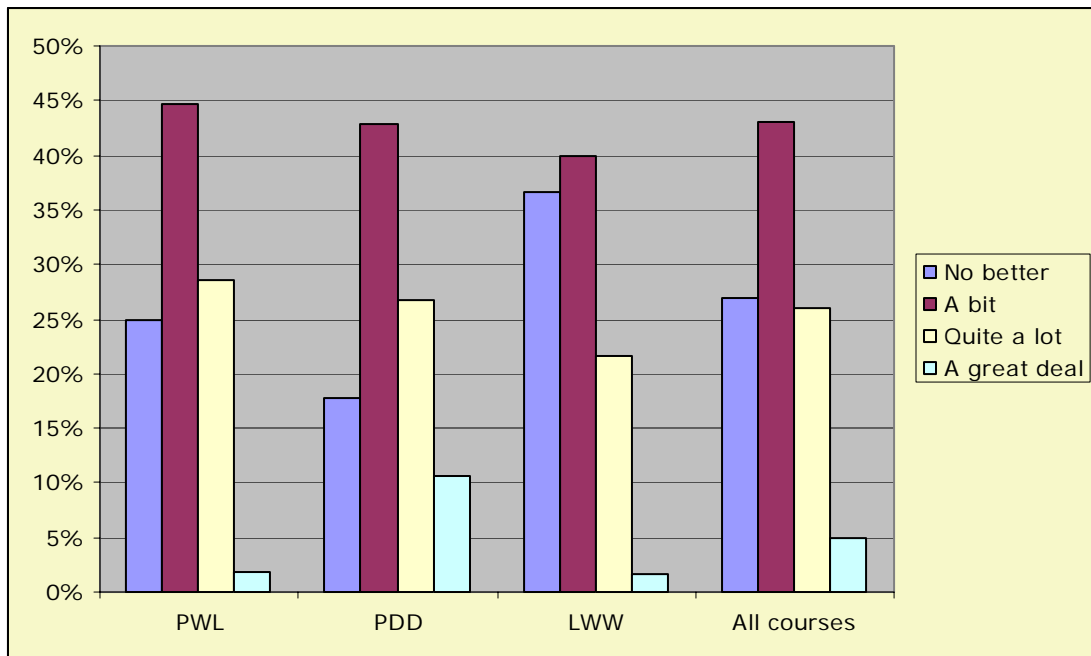
mainstreaming), and were looking for answers which might not yet be within the collective knowledge base of neighbourhood renewal.

### Learning objectives met?

Given the emphasis in the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills programme on helping to develop “practical skills to radically alter the way they work”, we investigated the effectiveness of the programme in addressing the learning objectives set out for each course.

From the course outlines, we took four learning objectives for each course and asked each participant, “To what extent do you feel you now... [for example: better understand the neighbourhood renewal context for partnership working]?” on each one<sup>9</sup>.

**Figure 4** Extent to which learning objectives have been met



N: PWL = 56 participants ; PDD = 55; LWW = 60; all courses = 171

This analysis shows that just over a quarter of participants felt that they had not progressed in their abilities or knowledge relating to the course objectives, and just over two-fifths felt that they had gained a marginal amount (‘a bit’ in the scale offered). Few felt that they had made ‘a great deal’ of progress. This is relatively disappointing, given that the stated intent of *RenewalAcademy*<sup>10</sup> is that, “The learning outcomes have been set by the providers. They deliberately relate to skills and behaviours (ie, beyond merely knowledge) since the principal objective has been to improve skills”. There was little difference between the Creating Impact and Delivering Impact strands over the set of courses.

These findings challenge course design: is it sufficiently fit for purpose? Are learning objectives clear and appropriate, and is the programme designed coherently to maximise

<sup>9</sup> These were not consistently stated in early course publicity and literature, and we had to choose a form of wording which fitted the language used and the outline course content. The questions asked for each course can be found in Appendix C.

<sup>10</sup> Source: *RenewalAcademy* Progress Report July 2004

the likelihood that these objectives will be delivered? At the same time, it is fair to pose questions about what is realistic to achieve from a three day course.

*Learning applied*

We asked open questions asking participants what they had personally put into practice from the course and what they expected to apply in future. Table 3 provides a range of examples of actions taken. A quarter (11 out of 43) of respondents felt that they had applied nothing (or at best, very little).

**Table 3 Examples of Learning Applied**

Examples of Learning Applied	
<b>Partnership Working &amp; Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ approach to assessing whether a partnership is not delivering or likely to, and action to take (withdrawal/ seeking partner agreement to wind it down)</li> <li>▪ reappraising own behaviour 'as a leader not just an implementer'; seeking to ensure that consensus is robust not 'groupthink'; accepting that people wanting to stand back from what rest of partners are doing is not always negative</li> <li>▪ engaging stakeholders more in the development stages of projects</li> <li>▪ improved organisation of partnership meetings to make them more productive</li> </ul>
<b>Programme Design &amp; Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ much improved project appraisal</li> <li>▪ greater priority to gathering evidence, evaluation and performance management</li> <li>▪ ensuring better linkages between outputs and outcomes in programme design, monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>▪ more robust review of programme strategy</li> <li>▪ steps to involve the community more in performance management reviews</li> </ul>
<b>Learning from What Works</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ on-line use of the Indices of Deprivation, including new analyses at Super Output Area level</li> <li>▪ more precision on information needs, especially for evaluation and performance management purposes</li> <li>▪ more effective use of data (including use of Floor Targets Interactive)</li> <li>▪ role of evidence brought to the fore in making the case for a major housing programme</li> <li>▪ reviewed evaluation policy and practices to make them more rigorous</li> <li>▪ emphasised to others the value of an evidence-based approach. Use of evidence to help set priorities where there are tensions, eg, between what residents want and broader strategic goals in the Community Strategy</li> <li>▪ remodelling of project structures (especially on how to plan, use and interpret evidence)</li> <li>▪ greater emphasis on seeking evidence to devise sharp targets in reviewing of Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and integrating it with the Community Strategy</li> </ul>

We also asked about *barriers* to applying the learning: most interviewees had not encountered any. This was mainly because as individuals they had control over what they were implementing. Only 6 respondents reckoned that they encountered barriers to a marginal degree, and two 'quite a lot'. Where comments were made, these related to someone who had changed jobs and was not yet in a position to implement what they had learned; difficulty in getting hold of statistics needed to measure performance; and lack of skills amongst community representatives to interpret statistics and research and make use of evidence.

### *Learning transferred*

To gauge a further possible benefit of the courses, we also asked whether participants had passed the learning on to others: three quarters said they had. This transfer has mainly taken place through informal discussions with managers and colleagues. Participants have made some specific recommendations relating, eg, to their partnership's approach to performance management reviews, stakeholder analysis, their use of Renewal.net and the 2004 Indices of Deprivation, and their use of evidence more generally. Participant comments tended *not* to suggest active cascading of the course content, or other use of course materials or approaches in learning and development activities locally.

## **4.5 Changes and improvements made**

In our approach to evaluating the Skills and Knowledge Programme, we have sought to identify the extent to which Skills and Knowledge interventions have led to changes and improvements in organisational or partnership practice and, wherever possible, to neighbourhood renewal outcomes (as a direct *or* indirect consequence of taking part in the course).

When we asked whether participants had made **changes in their working practices** we found that two thirds had done so, with a notable grouping commenting on improvements made to partnership working. As many as eight out of the thirty had adjusted how they act towards others in a partnership setting, while others had altered their approach to setting up partnerships, providing leadership or seeking to influence within a partnership, or resolving a partnership problem or conflict. Three also have acted on partnership learning plans. The other grouping of responses (10 participants) related to monitoring, evaluation and the use of evidence.

We also asked interviewees if they could point to any **improvements in partnership or organisational performance, service delivery, or specific outcomes for local people**. The largest group (14) felt that it was too early to say, and nine said that they could not point to any improvements. Those that could tended to refer to progress in partnership working rather than (as yet) improved performance. Illustrations of changes and improvements included:

*"I've already seen some changes in how people behave."*

PWL

*"We're spending more time building partnerships, emphasising getting the right structure and partners, not just the usual suspects. Participation and functions must meet needs of delivery requirements."*

PWL

*"We've made a noticeable improvement in communications within/ across partnership."*

PDD

*"We now have a better evidence-based approach to the use of funding."*

PDD

*“Our project appraisal processes are much more focused through checklists, both at initial stage and for fuller processes. This amounts to us having more robust systems at evaluating project implementation.”*

PDD

*“The evaluation strategy is now more rigorous, and we are taking account of things which were not previously included - such as seeking a better understanding of why a failed project did fail.”*

LWW

Actions which participants still had to take included: reviewing their own leadership style and that of others within a new unit; introducing new software to improve project planning, delivery and monitoring; improving access to and use of up-to-date statistics; working with voluntary and community organisations to help them see the bigger picture and take broader project overviews; and improving the information base for performance management.

#### 4.6 Further learning needs

A further benefit of this type of course can be the opportunity it provides for participants to reflect on their learning needs. Over two thirds (30) *had* identified further needs. Examples included:

**Table 4 Further Learning Needs**

Examples of Learning Needs Identified		
Partnership Working & Leadership	Programme Design & Delivery	Learning from What Works
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ review and develop personal leadership style</li> <li>▪ personal and partnership need for improved partnership working</li> <li>▪ take more account of practice from elsewhere</li> <li>▪ more knowledge about how communities work</li> <li>▪ greater understanding of whole neighbourhood renewal agenda in context of a two-tier authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ detail of contract management: especially legal, and statutory aspects</li> <li>▪ better understanding of project life cycles</li> <li>▪ evaluation in more depth</li> <li>▪ how to get on top of the policy issues - especially with amount of new policy and documents to read</li> <li>▪ understanding of long term strategic business planning</li> <li>▪ defining baselines</li> <li>▪ option appraisal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ statistics in more depth</li> <li>▪ more detailed knowledge of evidence-based approaches, including use in performance management</li> <li>▪ developing indicators for practical application</li> <li>▪ more tools for eliciting information/ evidence from others, especially “knowledge about solutions, not just problems”</li> </ul>

A few participants noted that their course had helped them understand what they did not know (eg. one highlighting needs in management, understanding bureaucracy, business planning and finance) - an essential platform for further learning. Participants’ plans included further short courses (8), accredited learning (4) and use of the internet (4). As many as 10 out of 43 wanted to attend more *RenewalAcademy* courses - with a few expressing interest in these as a route to a qualification.

## 4.7 Improving the Programme

### *Suggestions for improving the programme*

We sought the views of participants on how to improve the programme. Nearly half of interviewees had suggestions to make on course administration and content (21 on each), with 16 making suggestions on course delivery and seven on materials. These are set out in Table 5.

**Table 5 Suggestions for Course Improvements**

Administration	Content	Delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ provide earlier and better information about the course. (At least seven comments on the poor quality of what was distributed.)</li> <li>▪ make evaluation forms available at the start (<i>“very hard to do properly at the end”</i>)</li> <li>▪ make sure that any preparation, or need to bring material or information is flagged up in pre-course material</li> <li>▪ <i>“if actions are promised for after the course, do them”</i> (PDD)</li> <li>▪ find out more about participants beforehand (and use this information)</li> <li>▪ improve materials (sections in pack without any contents) - <i>“and use it!”</i></li> <li>▪ put materials onto a CD to take away: they weren't used much on the course</li> <li>▪ ensure all (reasonable) eventualities are planned for. <i>“Wasn't sure this had been done, or worked through”</i></li> <li>▪ plan dates not to clash with school holidays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ strengthen the practical grounding of the content on partnership working (less academic content)</li> <li>▪ ensure content and facilitators are fully up-to-date and in touch with the breadth of current practice (4 references)</li> <li>▪ get faster into the meat... take care in the use of icebreakers, and don't spend too long on preliminaries</li> <li>▪ avoid trying to cover too much ground within the time available (mentioned by at least 7 participants)</li> <li>▪ reduce the length (argued by at least five) (though three argued to increase the length)</li> <li>▪ take care in course design not to put two 'heavy' items together (LWW: the NRU stats focus) and don't put stats on just after lunch</li> <li>▪ make more use of concrete examples of successful projects, with “more on the whys and wherefores” (PDD), use of live case studies (PWL)</li> <li>▪ restructure technical material - eg, statistics. Provide good ref material; bring it to early part of day. Provide further references etc (LWW)</li> <li>▪ involve participants from previous courses in planning future ones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ensure more consistent quality of facilitation (8 references)</li> <li>▪ do more to capture and share participant knowledge and experience (4 references)</li> <li>▪ involve NRU representatives more, to <i>“help people understand more about it and what's driving their need to drive partnerships so hard”</i></li> <li>▪ make the course and its content flow better</li> <li>▪ get the technology right!</li> <li>▪ make better use of the course materials (<i>“These were not drawn out to enhance content or to show their relevance”</i>)</li> <li>▪ use PowerPoint not OHP (<i>“more professional”</i>)</li> <li>▪ make sure all the course is covered, (<i>“unless there is consensus that things should be skipped”</i>)</li> <li>▪ ensure you get the most out of external speakers</li> </ul>

We note that a few responses demonstrate the impossibility of pleasing all participants all of the time. For example, while many comments stressed the value of the practical content, group work, etc, one participant felt that “experiential learning” (role plays, etc) was not for her, seeking more *“the facts, figures, tools, techniques, hints, tips and so on”*.

## 5 Developing the Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills Programme

We have reviewed all the survey suggestions under the headings below of

- a) the Renewal Academy programme as a whole
- b) course content and delivery
- c) course administration
- d) maximising the benefits
- e) marketing and recruitment

We add observations on these topics in reviewing the comments. Overall, the feedback from participants points to the importance of setting and maintaining high standards in programme design, delivery, promotion and administration. Evidence from the area fieldwork and from feedback on GO regional Skills and Knowledge programmes further demonstrates the importance of high standards in building the credibility needed to grow demand for RenewalAcademy provision.

### 5.1 Developing the overall programme

We consider that some of the suggestions made by participants are worth further consideration:

- *“provide accreditation”*

Accreditation tends to be something wanted by participants who have fewer qualifications, and for whom the goal of a new qualification can be a significant motivation to learn. Accreditation may also be regarded favourably by managers, management committees, etc, when deciding whether or not to support a request from a member of staff to undertake training. One participant advocated a RenewalAcademy Certificate of Achievement for Regeneration Practitioners based on credits from attending all the modules, and a case for certification was made by others. An initial way forward has been provided by Northern College through their involvement in delivering the Delivering Impact course on Programme Design and Delivery, in offering participants credits towards National Open College Network (NOCN) qualifications<sup>11</sup>.

- *“develop as a series that people could access: not just a one-off”*

The programme could be developed in a way which provided a coherent curriculum. More reinforcement of learning could be expected across such a series of courses, and an accredited option could be made available.

We suggest more generally that a ‘blended learning’ approach be adopted, mixing different kinds of learning (short courses, on-line materials, exercises, etc) intended to

---

<sup>11</sup> NOCN provides approved national qualifications and programmes and quality assures the work of 28 sub-regional Open College Networks (OCNs). OCNs offer a service to learning providers, enabling them to offer national qualifications *and* local accreditation of locally designed provision to meet organisational and learner needs. This route to qualifications is especially appropriate for community-based learning for neighbourhood renewal.



provide ways of reinforcing learning for all participants, not only those who wish to attend two or three day courses.

- *“design courses to meet needs of those who are relatively new (breadth not depth) and for those with experience (more depth and less breadth)”*
- *“develop Masterclass level to cater for the needs of more experienced managers”*

There is scope to develop provision further, designed in relation to different levels of experience: eg, for the most experienced providing opportunities for serious reflection, challenge and problem solving (which may or may not involve ‘masters’ in the original sense of the term Masterclass in its use in music teaching).

- *“tailor some provision to the needs of senior managers from particular disciplines (such as housing) who need to understand the neighbourhood renewal context for other services (such as education and health)”*

There is scope with related professional bodies to explore how neighbourhood renewal themes can feature more in learning opportunities they provide or sponsor in their continuing professional development requirements (eg, with RTPI, CIPD). This could be addressed through or in conjunction with the Academy for Sustainable Communities<sup>12</sup>.

- *“aim for more homogenous participant groups”*

The relatively more positive (and less critical) feedback from subsequent events run for CENs and NDCs suggests that there is merit in this argument. Courses can be better tailored and designed to meet specific common needs, and it can be easier to encourage groups of participants to gel.

That said, there can be significant gains from mixing participants from different types of organisations and partnerships: eg, discussions of mainstreaming can be more productive where there are participants from different agencies and from neighbourhood partnerships.

- *“provide more localised events to bring local people together”*

Local events can address specific local issues and learning needs in ways which are not possible in regional and national provision. Local, non-residential courses would also enable some people to take part in the training who might otherwise be excluded from doing so (eg, lone parents, women from certain BME groups).

As currently envisaged by the NRU, *RenewalAcademy* courses may be offered as part of support packages for partnerships with the biggest delivery challenges. These will need to be highly differentiated to partnership needs. The experience of running the pilot for Derby City Partnership highlights the need for a diagnostic and planning phase to ensure that the course fits requirements rather than a wholly ‘off the shelf’ option.

Tailoring to the needs of individual partners may benefit from use of an appropriate diagnostic tool. In many cases it may prove more effective to start with a clean sheet of

---

<sup>12</sup> The new national centre for skills for sustainable communities, set up in response to the Egan Review (ODPM 2004).

paper, but draw on content developed for previous open programmes in devising courses to fit local requirements. There may also be a need to design provision very much with a focus on specific work-related outputs, where participants can see the direct benefits to their day-to-day work.

## *5.2 Improving course content and delivery*

Many of the comments by participants provide good guidance for future content and delivery of the programme. Some comments reflect a need to ensure consistent application of principles and standards already identified by *RenewalAcademy*, in some cases acting on participant feedback from the early courses. *RenewalAcademy* have, for instance, sought to ensure that tutors are co-ordinated and external speakers well-briefed - but this has not avoided problems during courses (eg, on one Programme Design and Delivery course where tutors interrupted and contradicted each other). Tighter delivery should follow from greater experience in delivering the programme.

Other points - relevant more generally in designing learning activities for neighbourhood renewal - include:

- great care must be taken in the programme design to ensure a clear and logical flow from learning objectives through to course content. It is important from the feedback to ensure that course content is not rushed, so greater focus will be required on core content and how to maximise the learning.
- the content must appeal directly to the day-to-day needs of participants - while providing the opportunity for them to stand back and reflect
- courses must take full advantage of participant experience and the scope to learn from each other. (While this has been a guiding principle for *RenewalAcademy*, the feedback suggests there is more that could be done.)

*“People want to hear about challenging/ risky techniques to help them bring about change. There’s an issue about how to capture learning that’s held by participants through their experience.”*

PWL

- the programme should draw on a wide range of neighbourhood renewal experience, not just one programme such as NDC
- revisit the technical material, eg, on statistics, to ensure that it is digestible and well-timed in relation to the overall course schedule. There was a concern, eg, on Learning from What Works, that two ‘heavy’ items were placed together, including one on statistics on just after lunch.
- review the content and use of the course materials. Several participants commented on the need to make better use of these (*“These were not drawn out to enhance content or to show their relevance”*), and there were requests from the Learning from What Works courses for further references. The packs for the pilot courses contained an assortment of materials (drawn, eg, from *Renewal.net*) and did not necessarily comprise all the handouts and exercises used during each course. They could be packaged better in ways which would help participants pass on their learning and relevant content after the course, increasing potential benefits. (There was a request for the materials to be provided on CD-ROM.)

- allow good time for action planning and course evaluation (making evaluation forms available at the start)

Lessons can and have been drawn relating to the balance and coherence of programme content (eg, in trying to cover less ground on later courses). Participants have been asked to do more preparation, eg, revisiting the National Strategy so that it does not have to be covered in the course itself. On some courses, participants are now asked to bring their own strategies, either to draw on in group sessions or to use as reference for action planning.

#### *5.4 Administration*

Many of the comments involved getting the basics of course administration right, suggesting that the organisers:

- provide earlier and better information about each course.
- make sure that any preparation, or need to bring material or information, is flagged up in pre-course material
- follow through on promises made during a course
- find out more about participants beforehand (and use this information)
- ensure all (reasonable) eventualities are anticipated in course planning

RenewalAcademy's experience has led them to conclude that venues must be in or close to deprived neighbourhoods (facilitating site visits), and well-equipped training centres are generally better than most hotels.

#### *5.5 Marketing and recruitment*

Feedback from participants poses questions about the efficacy of existing marketing channels and promotional materials. RenewalAcademy are very concerned to improve marketing, and are devoting efforts to building up relationships with target partnerships and with GOs. Direct contact with partnerships is seen as vital, to help ensure that participation is linked with the partnership's own development needs and that, where necessary, there is ready authorisation of attendance by line managers. Amongst the early courses, there were many cases of individuals applying purely on their own initiative.

RenewalAcademy have sought particular promotional opportunities, eg, having a stall and making an input to an NDC conference. They have found that their leaflets have had little impact on direct bookings, though these are important for information purposes. They have adopted a practice of e-mailing prospective participants and partnerships about 6-8 weeks in advance of the course dates. Their experience has been, "*until we speak directly with people at the partnerships, either on the phone or at conferences, etc, there is not much response*". Even then they note how difficult it can be: individuals may not have identified their learning needs, or find it difficult to admit to these, and the organisations concerned may not have a clear priorities for staff development.

Participation has not been as high from partnerships with the biggest delivery challenges as programme organisers have wished, which is put down to the delivery pressures which staff are under. While recruitment on the pilot programmes did succeed in attracting people from the voluntary and community sectors, the range of participants from within

the public sector has largely been limited to those from regeneration or neighbourhood management in local authorities or from partnerships themselves, rather than from agencies such as the police and health. To achieve this greater spread, it will be helpful to promote the programme through the main channels relevant to each thematic sector, highlighting the relevance of the programme to them over and above their own sector-specific provision. This should not be left to *RenewalAcademy*, as there levers which the NRU and GOs can apply in their relationships with other government departments and in their respective communications and commissioning activities.

Relationships with GOs give some cause for concern, as we found considerable doubts amongst GO staff (programme as well as Skills and Knowledge staff) about the Delivery Skills programme. Many strongly felt that three days is a 'non-starter', questioning who can make such time available. They have encountered - or expect - comments along lines that the course is "too far, too long, and I'm too busy", and that it can be a 'hard sell'. The credibility of the programme was called into question by the early experience of very short recruitment lead times, and several Skills and Knowledge leads said that they had had no feedback on who had taken part on the courses from their region. There were also objections from a number of regions which had not hosted the venue for courses run up to that point. There has been little direct exposure to the programme: of the initial participants, only one was from a GO, though a few GO representatives were invited as contributors. That said, there is some interest in regionally or more locally tailored offerings under the Delivery Skills programme.

It will be important to promote positive messages from the pilot courses run to date, and to provide more feedback to GOs on take-up from their regions. We found that a good proportion (over a quarter) of participants planned to do more *RenewalAcademy* courses, and that just over half had recommended the programme to others. This is a good test of user satisfaction, and we suggest that in future follow-up evaluations this can be used as a proxy of course quality.

Publicity material must make courses stand out from each other more. It was difficult, eg, to understand the ways in which the strategic and operational courses were meant to be different. Course literature must give people a good idea of what to expect - and what will be expected of them.

There is now an advanced programme of courses and dates, which will help avoid some of the early problems with recruitment. In planning this, there is a need to liaise with GOs, regional and national networks to avoid dates which clash.

## *5.6 Programme sustainability*

There are strategic questions about the future development of the Delivery Skills programme. The main current concern of the NRU is to ensure that those partnerships 'most in need' take advantage of the training on offer. In part this will be met through offering the services of the Delivery Skills programme to individual partnerships as part of tailored packages of support negotiated by GOs and NRAs acting as lead assignment managers.

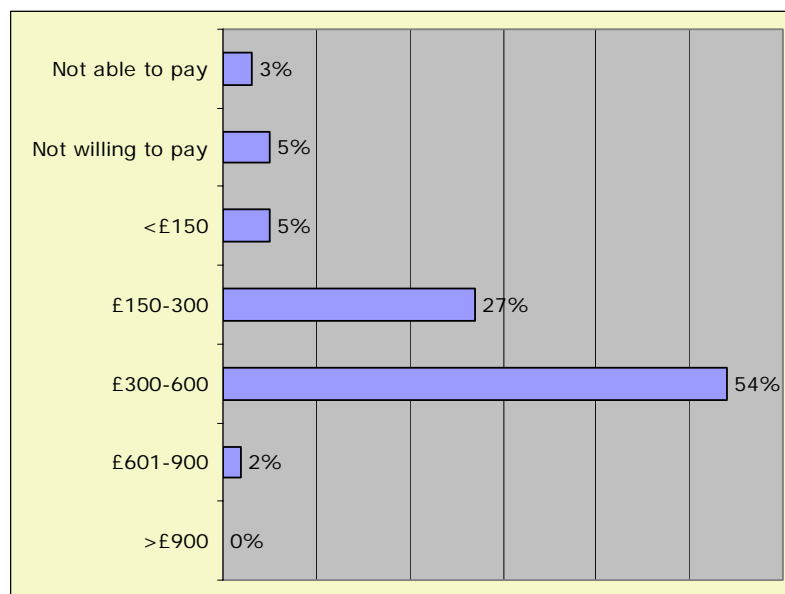
The feedback from the pilot courses suggests that short courses of up to three days duration should have a place in the future Delivery Skills programme - but as only one element of this. *RenewalAcademy* have identified scope for action learning, linked to

practical issues shared by groups or practitioners. They have suggested a range of steps to support in-house learning, including workbooks and packs which participants could take away to use in their own learning activities and guidance to assist people in work shadowing or job swaps. They have also proposed development of new curriculum materials on high level leadership skills and operational level strategic skills, and possibly around what community representatives need in negotiating change for their communities.

There is potential for wider development as well, given that many people - and many partnerships - have related learning and development needs. These needs are similar in non-NRF areas as well as NRF ones, though there is greater emphasis on delivery and performance management requirements in the latter.

Given limited resources available to the Delivery Skills programme, there is a need to think at an early stage about how programme benefits could be spread to a wider set of participants. With this in mind, we asked interviewees how much they would be prepared to pay for the course they attended or a similar one. We found that most were prepared to pay between £300 and £600 - very low in relation to the cost per participant on current Delivery Skills programme budgeting (over £1,600 on the pilot programmes. The economics, however, may allow extension of provision, involving, say one or two day courses. Scaling up *RenewalAcademy* provision would probably require exploration of a franchise model with other providers involving quality assurance, intellectual property safeguards, and shared risk taking. This will need to be considered in the context of the developing role of Regional Centres of Excellence, some of which have desires or plans to develop related training offerings.

**Figure 5 Willingness to pay for Delivery Skills courses**



*N = 37 survey respondents – Question: How much would you/your organisation be prepared to pay to fund staff members to go on this or a comparable course?*

Current policy is not to charge participants, though it is a fair assumption to make that the lack of fee (and therefore lack of financial consequence) increases the likelihood of people dropping out in advance. One option may be to introduce charges while setting bursaries for target partnerships and category of participants. Some participants felt

strongly that charges should be introduced, to help ensure that the provision provided real value that people would be prepared to pay for:

*“It’s essential for courses to be paid for to ensure that learning is clearly identified and then measurably able to be implemented.”*

Some were hesitant to plump for a particular range, stating that they would be prepared to pay more if they were convinced that it was a really good course (a comparison being drawn with Prince2 project management training which costs £2,000).

*“The cost is not as simple as just a figure. It’s also about being convinced of value to ensure that learning really gets used: training budgets tight.”*

Others were concerned about their/ their organisation’s ability to pay: *“Subsidies will need to be continued - for instance, £1,000 might be a whole year’s training budget for an individual: benefits of course would have to be made much more crystal clear to justify”*. Others might not have access to this level of funding.

## 6 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Meeting unmet needs

We conclude that **the pilot Delivery Skills Programme has begun to tackle critical learning needs in neighbourhood renewal**, addressing significant needs not adequately covered by other provision, and with a strong bias towards National Strategy implementation. Feedback from our follow-up survey of participants suggests that the pilot Delivery Skills programme has made a good start, when assessing the levels of satisfaction and benefits reported. There was favourable feedback amongst the two thirds who rated their course content good or excellent. There were also some serious criticisms – though associated with constructive ideas programme improvement. There is considerable goodwill towards the programme, as illustrated by the following quote:

*“I’m enthusiastic about concept of learning about neighbourhood renewal. It’s very good that there’s wide range of practitioners willing to share and learn from each other. The pilot really should succeed. Success depends a lot on facilitation, and getting the right mix of people. The emphasis on use of evidence to prove success was good!”*  
LWW

### 6.2 Benefits gained

The pilot programme has largely addressed requirements in the NRU brief for it to be - in the eyes of many participants - “practical, grounded and informed by live case study examples” and “stimulating, interactive and imaginative”, though **for many participants the greatest benefits have come from getting to know their fellow participants and share their trials and tribulations**. The extent to which most feel better equipped for their roles in neighbourhood renewal reflects in significant part the increased confidence and reassurance they gained from this. We found that a quarter of participants had not applied any learning from the course they attended, though two thirds had made changes to their working practices. Where they could point to organisational improvements, these mainly concerned improvements in how partners work together and in their use of evidence. Participants saw these changes as relevant to achieving improved neighbourhood renewal outcomes but did not (at least as yet) point to any such specific results.

### 6.3 Improving programme quality

There is scope to improve the quality of the programme to consistent standards in a number of ways, including its marketing, pre-course information, and facilitation. Specific recommendations include:

- frame tighter learning objectives reflected in programme design
- make more of the experience of the participants themselves
- build course evaluation and action planning in throughout the course, rather than leaving it to the end
- ensure course content and facilitators are fully up-to-date

- gear the content of the course packs more to the content of the course, refer to it more during the course, and package it in a way that will help participants pass on the learning to others

#### *6.4 Future programme development*

Our evaluation also **confirms thinking on development of the programme, including the introduction of ‘master class’ and more modular provision, including shorter and non-residential courses** (to help ensure the widest possible range of participants). These should be planned where possible to offer a programme of linked learning rather than one-off events. In planning future provision, there is a need for co-ordination involving a number of interested parties, in particular, NRU Skills and Knowledge and programme teams, GOs, RCEs and the Academy for Sustainable Communities. Without co-ordination, there is scope for wasting resources in developing overlapping provision with the risk of confusing prospective participants. It will be important to be clear about the respective roles to be pursued at national, regional and local levels.

We note also NRU plans to deliver training for individual partnerships. Where this is pursued, the content of the training must be highly tailored, requiring diagnostic interviews in advance. While it will be important that such training provides opportunities for reflection by participants, proposals will attract interest where they are geared to practical challenges within the partnership concerned, especially ones which have direct bearing on people’s day to day jobs<sup>13</sup>.

**Further attention is needed on how to create more demand for the Delivery Skills programme.** Positive feedback from the current programme can be used to raise interest and win support from not only prospective participants but also from their peers and managers and key influencers such as Government Office staff. *RenewalAcademy* and the NRU will be reviewing business models appropriate to the future development and sustainability of the programme.

Course development and delivery has been relatively generously funded, appropriate to a pilot programme and not out of proportion to typical costs in training development. Future provision should require less development time, though this will be offset by additional requirements where provision is to be tailored to individual partnerships. In the case of off-the-shelf courses, we support the case made by *RenewalAcademy* to extend the numbers of participants on each course to around 20, which should be manageable given the co-tutoring approach. This would enable the programme to reach more people in a shorter space of time, and represent better value for money.

---

<sup>13</sup> The experience of the *Working Together, Learning Together* programme in Scotland is relevant in that it focused on partnerships rather than individuals, recruiting groups from Social Inclusion Partnerships to national events and providing follow-up support to assist with learning transfer in individual partnerships. Benefits gained from WTLT were broadly similar to those we report on the Delivery Skills programme: increased participant confidence, changes in partnership processes. The partnership-specific support was taken up by around half of the 61 SIPs, though only a small number had thought strategically about how to use this resource. The commitment of the SIP manager was crucial to progress, as were sufficient resources to support in-house activity. Overall, the programme had more impact where SIP partners were already receptive to change.



In order to evaluate the impact of the programme we recommend also that follow-up evaluations are undertaken four to six months after each course, seeking to identify learning applied, organisational changes and (where possible) results, in line with key questions asked as part of this evaluation. Where tailored courses are run as part of support packages for individual partnerships, the evaluation might be undertaken as part of a wider review of the effectiveness of the support package as a whole.

### *6.5 Maximising the learning*

There is less evidence of achievement of course learning objectives in relation to the primary programme aim of equipping participants “with practical skills to radically alter the way they work, enabling them to embed new skills and knowledge into their ongoing practice”. While participants rated their course ‘good’ (an average score of 3.88 out of 5) on the extent to which they felt that it had equipped them better for their role in neighbourhood renewal, we found that participants on reflection felt that their course had helped them only ‘a bit’ (not ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal’) in relation to the specific learning outcomes identified for each course. This finding raises questions about the design of the learning programmes, about the case for post-course follow-up, and about what it is realistic to expect from a three day course. There is one **central issue which needs to be addressed: how can the *learning outcomes* of the programme be maximised as part of a learning process which extends beyond the course?**

This needs to be considered by the *RenewalAcademy* team and by the NRU Project Board. Ideas to consider include:

- ways in which course design can be strengthened to maximise the prospects of learning transfer
- whether or not there could be related follow-up courses (say, one-day) or action learning sets for smaller groups of participants, or organising courses on a two days plus one basis (which would retain the benefits of having overnight events - that is, for those able to attend such courses)
- making available or signposting other related learning materials
- encouraging participants to set up a peer learning group, mentoring arrangement and/ or e-mail group for post-course communication.

## Appendix A Breakdown of Participants on the Pilot Courses

Job Description	No	%
CEN Member	3	4
LSP Coordinator	5	7
LSP Member	1	1
LSP Support Officer	9	13
NDC Chief Executive	1	1
NDC Deputy Director/ Chief Exec	3	4
NDC Programme Manager	10	14
NDC Project Manager	1	1
Neighbourhood Manager	10	14
NRU	1	1
Partnership Coordinator	1	1
Partnership Member	3	4
Programme Manager	6	9
Project Manager	9	13
Strategic Manager	6	9
Strategic Officer	1	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>100</i>

Sex	No	%
Male	31	44
Female	39	56
<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>100</i>

Agencies	No	%
CEN	3	4
Community	9	13
GO	2	3
Local Authority	19	27
LSP	10	14
NDC	17	24
NMP	5	7
ODPM	1	1
PCT	1	1
Private	3	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>100</i>

Region	No	%
East Midlands	5	7
London	19	27
North East	10	14
North West	12	17
South East	4	6
South West	4	6
West Midlands	6	6
Yorkshire	9	13
Not determined	1	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>100</i>

Ethnicity	No	%
White	59	84
Mixed	0	0
Asian or Asian British	3	4
Black or Black British	5	7
Other Ethnic	3	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Renewal Academy course records

## Appendix B Interviewee Characteristics

<b>Type of organisation</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
Community Empowerment Network	1	2.3
LA - other	4	9.3
LA - regeneration	12	27.9
Local Strategic Partnership	3	7.0
Neighbourhood partnership	6	14.0
New Deal for Communities	13	30.2
Voluntary organisation	2	4.7
Other	2	4.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>100</i>

<b>Role in neighbourhood renewal</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
Non-response	1	2.3
Community development worker	2	4.7
Community/ voluntary sector representative	1	2.3
LA manager - operations	10	23.3
LA manager - strategy	5	11.6
Neighbourhood renewal worker	1	2.3
Partnership support officer	6	14.0
Partnership manager	13	30.2
Other	4	9.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>100</i>

<b>Experience: For how long have you been involved in renewal/ regeneration?</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
0-2 years	11	25.6
3-5 years	14	32.6
6-10 years	10	23.3
Over 10 years	8	18.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>100</i>

<b>Source: How did you hear about the course?</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
Government Office	3	7.0
Partnership manager	3	7.0
Line manager	14	32.6
Renewal Academy	4	9.3
E-mail from NRU	9	20.9
Neighbourhood Management Network	4	9.3
Other	3	7.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>100</i>

<b>Sex:</b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	28	65.1
Male	15	34.9

<b><i>Ethnicity</i></b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
White	36	83.7
Mixed	0	0.0
Asian or Asian British	1	2.3
Black or Black British	3	7.0
Chinese	0	0.0
Other ethnic	3	7.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>100</i>

<b><i>Level of qualification: To what level are you qualified?</i></b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
None	2	4.7
Level 2 (GCSE/NVQ2)	1	2.3
Level 3 (A level/NVQ3)	0	0.0
NVQ 4/5	2	4.7
Graduate	16	37.2
Postgraduate	20	46.5
Professional	2	4.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>100</i>

<b><i>Specific qualifications: Are any of these qualifications in renewal/ regeneration or related fields?</i></b>	<b>N°</b>	<b>%</b>
No	23	51.2
Housing	3	7.0
Planning	5	12.2
Community development	1	2.4
Urban regeneration	3	7.0
Social policy/ research	4	9.3
Social work	1	2.4
MBA	1	2.4
Education	2	4.7
Environmental management	2	26.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>100</i>

## **Appendix C Questions on Achievement of Learning Objectives**

### *A) Partnership Working and Leadership Operational & Strategic*

Taking each of the aims of the course in turn, to what extent do you feel you now ...

- a) better understand the neighbourhood renewal context for partnership working?
- b) can better identify what causes and overcome exclusion and conflict?
- c) are better able to provide leadership and influence partnership outcomes?
- d) are better able to implement 'what works' in partnership working?

### *B) Programme Design and Delivery Operational*

Taking each of the aims of the course in turn, to what extent do you feel you are now better able to...

- a) appreciate the project cycle approach to project and programme management?
- b) apply project management tools?
- c) link activities to programme outcomes?
- d) monitor projects and programmes?

### *C) Programme Design and Delivery Strategic*

Taking each of the aims of the course in turn, to what extent do you feel you are now better able to...

- a) design a robust programme with clear and relevant strategic objectives?
- b) contextualise your programme within wider strategies to renew neighbourhoods?
- c) ensure effective delivery?
- d) monitor and evaluate projects and programmes and bring about improvement?

### *D) Learning from What Works Operational*

Taking each of the aims of the course in turn, to what extent do you feel you are now better able to...

- a) identify and interpret appropriate evidence?
- b) use evidence to improve your own practice and share good practice?
- c) use evidence to help reshape mainstream service provision?
- d) explain to others the importance of using evidence?

### *E) Learning from What Works Strategic*

Taking each of the aims of the course in turn, to what extent do you feel you are now better able to...

- a) identify and interpret appropriate evidence?
- b) use evidence to improve the robustness of delivery?
- c) identify where and how mainstreaming can be deployed to improve services and sustainability?
- d) explain to others the importance of using evidence?